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Source: *American Literature*, Vol. 16, No. 4 (Jan., 1945), pp. 279-295

Published by: Duke University Press

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2920715>

Accessed: 27-06-2016 02:37 UTC

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# HENRY JAMES'S REVISION OF THE AMERICAN

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THE PRESENT STUDY aims to compare the first and final editions of *The American* with respect to prose style, characters, and plot and to deduce from the differences and from the Prefaces James's general theory of revision. Since James said that, of all his works, *The American* most needed and most deserved revision,<sup>1</sup> the texts of this novel should provide the best illustration of his practice in revising.<sup>2</sup>

Turning to a comparison of the two texts of *The American*: the notion that the later James was unable or unwilling to ask a plain question or give a direct answer<sup>3</sup> is not borne out by the changes he made in the novel. The alterations in diction constantly move in the direction of the specific, the concrete, and the explicit. James's search for the exact word is illustrated in the following emendation: "Well, I suppose I am happy," said Newman, meditatively" > "... said Newman, almost pensively."<sup>4</sup> The overtone of melancholy in *pensively* is precisely calculated to bring out New-

<sup>1</sup> Robert Herrick, "A Visit to Henry James," *Yale Review*, XII, 735 (July, 1923). See also the Preface to *The Golden Bowl* in Henry James, *The Art of the Novel* (New York, 1934), p. 344.

I submitted this article before I had seen F. O. Matthiessen's interesting essay on James's revision of *The Portrait of a Lady*. His study, "The Painter's Sponge and Varnish Bottle," *American Bookman*, I, 49-68 (Winter, 1944) is reprinted in his *Henry James: The Major Phase* (New York, 1944).

<sup>2</sup> Critical opinion on the nature and the value of James's revisions is divided. Robert Herrick, *op. cit.*, and Miss Hélène Harvitt, *PMLA*, XXXIX, 203-227 (March, 1924), believe that the revised texts are labored, ambiguous, and excessively analytical. But Professor Raymond Havens, *PMLA*, XL, 433 (March, 1925), and Miss Theodora Bosanquet, *Henry James at Work* (2d ed., London, 1927), p. 17, and Pelham Edgar, *Henry James: Man and Author* (London, 1927), pp. 237-241, find that James revised in the interest of clarity and expressiveness. Herrick contends that the changes in *The American* are so radical that the hero has been transmogrified from an ingenuous young man into an old, self-conscious, sophisticated egotist, whereas Miss Bosanquet affirms that James "allowed himself few freedoms" beyond matters of diction and sentence structure.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Edith Wharton's amusing story of how, on an automobile trip, James asked a direction of an old pedestrian and completely befuddled him. Mrs. Wharton came to the rescue with the simple words, "Where is King's Road?" (*A Backward Glance*, New York, 1934, pp. 242-243).

<sup>4</sup> 1877, p. 43; 1907, p. 44. The parallel passages are reprinted with the permission of Houghton Mifflin Company, owners of the copyrights.

man's sense of what he has missed in life. Another example occurs in the description of Newman's state of mind four months after his introduction to Mme de Cintré. He is still under the spell of that lady's eyes, and he wishes to see more of them. James had written: "Throughout these rather formless meditations he sometimes thought of his past life," but he revised to: "But there came to him sometimes too, through this vague rich forecast, the thought of his past life. . . ."<sup>5</sup> The emendation is sound, for Newman was not simply meditating but meditating on the future. In this same passage there is another typical alteration. Originally James wrote of Newman's past years in business: "They seemed far away now, for his present attitude was more than a holiday, it was almost a rupture." In 1907 James changed *rupture* to *repudiation* because he now saw that Newman was not merely breaking with his past but was wilfully renouncing it. On every page there are such emendations as these: "standing in an attitude of general hospitality" > "posture of general hospitality"; "domicile" > "rooms"; "odor of democracy" > "strong smell of democracy": "forgetfulness" > "detachment." Taken in their contexts, these changes show that one of James's intentions in revising was to replace the general word with the exact word.

James also sought to intensify concreteness in the revised *American*—that is, to thicken the sensuous texture of his writing. Sometimes he achieved this by changing nouns, as in the following examples:

1877	1907
. . . innumerable young women in irreproachable toilets. . . (6)	. . . innumerable young women in long aprons, on high stools. . . (2)
I don't care for pictures. (24)	I don't care for inanimate canvas or for cold marble beauty. . . (22)
. . . he had no more wish to hurry her, any more than he would have had the wish to hurry a golden sunrise. (238)	he had no more wish to hurry her than he would have had to hurry the slow flushing of the east at dawn. (271)
I have seen nothing objectionable except my husband leaning against the wall. . . . (283)	. . . except my husband leaning against that adorably faded strawberry damask of the other room. . . . (325)

<sup>5</sup> 1877, p. 94; 1907, p. 101.

As the last example indicates, James frequently added modifiers in order to secure concreteness. He constantly pointed up his nouns by inserting adjectives and prepositional phrases, as in the following passages:

1877		1907	
... a cerulean cravat. . . .	(8)	... a blue satin necktie of too light a shade. . . .	(4)
... he is some vulgar wretch. . . .	(303)	... a big hard breathing red-faced animal	(348)
“A duel—that will give me a push!” cried Mademoiselle Noémie, clapping her little hands.	(305)	“A meeting and a big noise—that will give me a push!” said Noémie, clapping with a soft thud her little pearl-coloured hands.	(350)

Even more noticeable is James's heavy use of adverbial modifiers. Although he was careful in his choice of verbs and adjectives, James felt the need of making each one more precise and concrete, as the following passages show:

1877		1907
His voice, always very mild and interrogative, gradually became as soft and as tenderly argumentative as if he had been talking to a much-loved child.	(157)	His voice, always very mild, almost flatly soft and candidly interrogative for such a full organ, had become as edgeless and as tenderly argumentative as if he had been talking to a much-loved child.
		(171)
. . . while Newman executed his obeisance.	(278)	. . . while Newman performed with all his length his liberal obeisance. He always made his bow, as he wrote his name, very distinctly.
		(319)
"You killed your husband." (429)		"You cruelly killed your helpless husband."
		(490)

To the same effect there are hundreds of changes such as these: "happier" > "distinctly happier"; "oh, we will discuss it, and let you know!" > "Oh, we'll discuss it thoroughly, and we'll promptly let you know"; "turning her face towards him" > "vaguely, rather indirectly, turning her face to him."

James took special pains with the verbs and adverbs in the stage directions of the dialogue. In the original version he had been rather overliberal with such labels as "Newman asked" and "said Mrs. Tristram," even when the words of the dialogue made clear the name of the speaker. Another novelist, say Jane Austen or Hemingway, would have deleted some of these, but James chose to develop them so that the reader is aware of the tone and mood of the speaker. Some typical changes are these: "said Newman" > "his friend soothingly returned"; "observed Newman" > "he calmly pleaded"; "Newman demanded" > "he demanded with an insistence that came easily to him now." At times these changes sink to the level of novelty-hunting. To cite an extreme case: in the first version the villain "asked very softly," whereas in the revision he "inordinately fluted." And the following directions do not label the speaker so much as they call attention to themselves: "she said" > "she sweetly shrilled"; "Newman declared" > "Newman roundly returned"; "said Madame de Cintr " > "she safely enough risked."

The dialogue in the revision is at times more idiomatic than it is in the original. In 1877 James had avoided contractions and colloquialisms, but in 1907 he was more tolerant of them. This is especially true of Newman's speeches, as the following examples will show: "I have been my own master all my life" > "I've skipped about in my shirt all my life"; "Oh, horrors!" > "Oh, shucks!"; "Yes" > "Yes—I'll be hanged if I ain't sure!"; "You are sad, eh?" > "You've got a sentimental stomach-ache, eh?" Such changes hardly bear out the view that James changed Newman from a simple American to a sophisticate, at least so far as his speech is concerned.

The greatest stylistic difference between the two versions of *The American* is the marked increase in figures of speech. It is obvious that in rereading the novel James translated plain statements into metaphors. Many of the figures simply make concrete an abstract noun or a generalized statement. This kind of figure is illustrated in the following passages:

1877	1907
Yes, this seeing of the world was very pleasant, and he would willingly do a little more of it. (93)	Yes, these waters of the free curiosity were very soothing, and he would splash in them till they ran dry. (100)

... and it was both uncomfortable and slightly contemptible to feel obliged to square one's self with a standard. (82)

The old lady greeted Newman with majestic formality, and, looking round her, called several of the persons who were standing near. They were elderly gentlemen, of what Valentin de Bellegarde had designated as the high-nosed category; two or three of them wore cordons and stars. (273)

... one shouldn't hunt about for a standard as a lost dog hunts for a master. (87)

His hostess greeted him with a fine hard urbanity and, looking round, called to several of the persons standing at hand. They were elderly gentlemen with faces as marked and featured and filled-in, for some science of social topography, as, to Newman's whimsical sense, any of the little towered and battered old towns, on high eminences, that his tour of several countries during the previous summer had shown him; they were adorned with strange insignia, cordons and ribbons and orders, as if the old cities were flying flags and streamers and hanging out shields for a celebration. . . . (313)

Some of the figures are essentially witty. In them James is playing with words and ideas or invoking surprise through the swift incongruity between the two elements in the figure. Of the many instances the following are typical:

1877

... he was too short, as he said, to afford a belly. (118)

The truth is that circumstances had done much to cultivate in Mrs. Tristram a marked tendency to irony. Her taste on many points differed from that of her husband, and though she made frequent concessions it must be confessed that her concessions were not always graceful. They were founded upon a vague project she had of some day

1907

... he was too short a story as he said, to afford an important digression. (129)

The truth is that circumstances had done much to cultivate in Mrs. Tristram the need for any little intellectual luxury she could pick up by the way. Her taste on many points differed from that of her husband; and though she made frequent concessions to the dull small fact that he had married her it must be confessed that her re-

doing something very positive, something a trifle passionate. What she meant to do she could by no means have told you; but meanwhile, nevertheless, she was buying a good conscience, by installments.

(35)

The marquis appeared to have decided that the fine arts offered a safe subject of conversation, as not leading to startling personal revelations. . . . His manners seemed to indicate a fine, nervous dread that something disagreeable might happen if the atmosphere were not purified by allusions of a thoroughly superior cast. "What under the sun is the man afraid of?" Newman asked himself. "Does he think I am going to offer to swap jack-knives with him?" It was useless to shut his eyes to the fact that the marquis was profoundly disagreeable to him.

(198-199)

serves were not always muffled in pink gauze. They were founded upon the vague project of her some day affirming herself in her totality; to which end she was in advance getting herself together, building herself high, enquiring, in short, into her dimensions. (35-36)

The Marquis appeared to have decided that the fine arts offered a safe subject of conversation, as not leading to uncouth personal revelations. . . . his manner seemed to indicate a fine nervous dread that something disagreeable might happen if the atmosphere were not kept clear of stray currents from windows opened at hazard. "What under the sun is he afraid of?" Newman asked himself. "Does he think I'm going to offer to swap jack-knives with him?" It was useless to shut his eyes to the fact that the Marquis was as disagreeable to him as some queer, rare, possibly dangerous biped, perturbingly akin to humanity, in one of the cages of a "show."

(219)

Some of the figures in the revision have the qualities of a seventeenth-century conceit: they are compounded of incongruous elements; they are spun out at great length; they create the thought rather than merely illustrate it. They are tools and materials rather than ornaments. In such figures the revised text differs markedly from the original, and the thought is altered, refined, and expanded, as in the following:

1877

He had little of the small change of conversation, and his stock of ready-made formulas and phrases was the scantiest.

(217)

1907

He had little of the small change of conversation and rarely rose to reach down one of those ready-made forms and phrases that drape,

whether fresh or frayed, the hooks and pegs of the general wardrobe of talk—that repository in which alone so many persons qualify for the discipline of society, as supernumerary actors prepare, amid a like provision, for the ordeal of the footlights. He was able on the other hand, at need, to make from where he sat one of the long arms that stretch quite out of place—to the effect, as might mostly be felt, of coming back with some proposition as odd as a single shoe. (242)

The foregoing kind of figure will not be approved by all readers and writers. If it is assumed that a figure of speech in narrative prose should lend itself to illustration by way of pencil or brush, the example just quoted will fail the test. But it cannot be said that James was laboriously contriving this figure for the sake of gratuitously decorating an idea that was more clearly and simply expressed in the text of 1877, for the two passages are not identical in meaning. The original makes the simplest kind of statement about Newman as a conversationalist; the revision makes the generalization, then adds a qualification, expands this into a comment upon society and conversation, and concludes with a new note on Newman as a talker.

To summarize: in revising *The American* James freely added modifiers, substituted exact, concrete words for general terms, reworked conventionalized figures of speech, and recast direct statements as figures. Although these changes result in sentences which are longer and more involved than those in the first edition, they do not fundamentally change the meanings: they refine and expand and comment upon the original ideas.

A comparison of the plot and characters of the two versions of *The American* may be made more understandable by a brief summary of the novel. It opens with Christopher Newman, a wealthy American newly arrived in Europe, visiting the Louvre and purchasing some works from a copyist, Mlle Noémie Nioche. Newman meets an old acquaintance, Tristram, whose wife introduces



him to an attractive widow of noble birth, Mme de Cintr . The American courts her, with the encouragement of her younger brother Count Valentin and despite the hostility of the older brother Urbain de Bellegarde and the mother. The latter two finally promise not to stand in the way of Newman's courtship, but after the engagement is announced they command Claire de Cintr  to give up Newman. Valentin, fatally wounded in a duel over Mlle Nioche, tells Newman that Mrs. Bread, an old servant, has some dark information which may be used to coerce the de Bellegardes. From Mrs. Bread, Newman secures a paper in which the former Marquis, on his deathbed, accused his wife of murdering him. After the death of Valentin, Mme de Cintr  announces that she will enter a nunnery, but this, together with Newman's threat to expose them, does not move the Marquis and his mother. Newman finally experiences a change of heart and burns the paper.

In revising *The American* James made no essential changes in the characters. Although he underscored a line here and lightened one there, he did not add or erase. In saying this I have in mind the following test question: Do the alterations justify or demand a change in the words one would use to describe a character or his motives or his actions? In every instance I find that no change is required, that at most I merely add the qualification "more" or "less." To cite a simple example: in the original version Newman is thirty-six years old, whereas in the revision he is forty-two and a half. But this difference does not change Newman from a young man to an old one. In both texts James's point is that Newman, after long experience in the workaday world of money-making, had reached the age of reflection. In the 1877 version he began to ask questions at age thirty-five, in the 1907 version at age forty.

James's practice in revising is well illustrated in his treatment of Newman's ingenuous declaration that he will make a great marriage. Early in the novel the American avers:

"I want to make a great hit. I want to take my pick. My wife must be a magnificent woman. . . . I want a great woman. . . . What else have I toiled and struggled for, all these years? . . . now what am I to do with my success? To make it perfect, as I see it, there must be a beautiful woman perched on the pile, like a statue on a monument. . . . I want to possess, in a word, the best article in the market."<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> 1877, pp. 47-48; 1907, p. 49.

Taken at face value, this declaration is very like what Newman would have called a commercial proposition. It comes dangerously near alienating the sympathy of the reader and jarring his credulity. James, on rereading the novel, was fully aware of the risk involved in Newman's speech, but he decided: "I had to take that over with the rest of him and fit it in."<sup>7</sup> To have changed Newman's attitude or to have canceled this episode would have been something more than revision: it would have called for rewriting. And so James retained Newman's words.

He did, however, make a few changes which slightly reduce Newman's rashness and his confidence in money. For example, he deleted a passage in which the American declares that he will make the lucky woman

"a very handsome offer. . . . Everything she wishes. If I get hold of a woman that comes up to my standard, I shall think nothing too good for her. . . . To combine the qualities I require seems to be difficult, but when the difficulty is vanquished it deserves a reward."<sup>8</sup>

To the same effect James left off the second clause in the following sentence: "I know the best can't be had for mere money, but I rather think money will do a good deal."<sup>9</sup> James dulled the edge of Newman's self-assurance, which was rather excessive in a character whom the reader was to admire and pity. Thus he deleted a page which ran as follows:

"I have never thought much about the reasons that make it proper for people to turn up their noses, and so I can only decide the question off-hand. Looking at it in that way I can't see anything in it. I simply think, if you want to know, that I'm as good as the best. . . . To tell the truth, I have always had a rather good opinion of myself; a man who is successful can't help it."<sup>10</sup>

In Newman's proposal of marriage James also moderated the American's strictures on the class system of Europe, but in that same speech Newman still declares: "I can assure you there's quite enough of me to last. . . ."<sup>11</sup>

In Herrick's opinion James distorted Newman by changing him from a blunt, simple American to an old egotist, too self-conscious and sophisticated to be attractive. As a matter of fact, the original

<sup>7</sup> *The Art of the Novel*, p. 39.

<sup>8</sup> 1877, p. 145.

<sup>9</sup> 1877, p. 34; 1907, p. 33.

<sup>10</sup> 1877, pp. 146-147.

<sup>11</sup> 1907, p. 169.

Newman was by no means obtuse. Although he was short on information and had little capacity for systematic, abstract thinking, he was a man of imagination. In 1907 James made slight changes in two of Newman's remarks about himself:

- |      |                                |      |      |  |      |
|------|--------------------------------|------|------|--|------|
| 1877 | "I am not intellectual."       | (43) | 1907 | "I don't come up to my own standard of culture."                                       | (45) |
| 1877 | "I am a highly civilized man." | (44) | 1907 | "I have the instincts—have them deeply—if I haven't the forms of a high civilization." | (45) |

The revised statements, it seems to me, do justice to Newman as James originally conceived him.

James, then, did not make his hero more intelligent and sensitive;<sup>12</sup> he only rendered more clearly the intelligence and sensibility which were implicit in the deeds and words of Newman in the 1877 version. This kind of change is illustrated in the following passage, which gives Newman's response to Valentin's question whether he was interested in religion:

- |      |   |       |      |   |           |
|------|---|-------|------|---|-----------|
| 1877 | "Not particularly. Are you a Roman Catholic, madam?" And he turned to Madame de Cintré. | (108) | 1907 | Newman thought. "Not actively." He found himself speaking as if it were a railroad or a mine; so that the next moment, to correct this, "Are you a Roman Catholic, madam?" he inquired of Madame de Cintré. | (117-118) |
|------|---|-------|------|---|-----------|

Again, when the Marquis too coolly and politely asks Newman whether he is traveling for pleasure, the American's state of mind is made clear in the revision:

- |      |  |       |      |   |       |
|------|--|-------|------|---|-------|
| 1877 | "Oh, I am knocking about to pick up one thing and another. Of course I get a good deal of pleasure out of it." | (174) | 1907 | "Well, I'm visiting your country, sir," Newman replied with a certain conscious patience—a patience he felt he on his side too could push, should need be, to stiffness; "and I confess I'm having a good time in it. Of course I get a good deal of pleasure out of it." | (189) |
|------|--|-------|------|---|-------|

<sup>12</sup> The only change in this direction is that Newman now takes with him on his tour of the Continent six volumes of Ruskin (1907, p. 103).

There are many passages in the revision in which Newman exhibits an awareness of the attitudes and motives of others. For example, he asks Mme de Cintr  whether she has been worried by the fear of annoying her mother and brother. In the original James merely gave Mme de Cintr 's answer, whereas in the revision he supplies Newman's response to her words:

1877

"I had undertaken more than I could carry out. I have very little courage; I am not a heroine." (197)

1907

"I had undertaken more than I could carry out. I've very little courage; I'm not a heroine." She said this, he could feel, to be very true with him; and it touched him as if she had pressed into his hand, for reminder, some note she had scrawled or some ribbon or ring she had worn. (218)

And James goes one step further: he makes Newman aware of others' awareness of his attitudes and motives. This interplay of consciousness is typically illustrated in the following passages:

1877

She was a woman for the light, not for the shade; and her natural line was not picturesque reserve and mysterious melancholy, but frank, joyous, brilliant action, with just so much meditation as was necessary, and not a grain more. To this, apparently, he had succeeded in bringing her back. He felt, himself, that he was an antidote to oppressive secrets; what he offered her was, in fact, above all things a vast, sunny immunity from the need of having any. (218)

1907

She was a creature for the sun and the air, for no sort of hereditary shade or equivocal gloom; and her natural line was neither imposed reserve nor mysterious melancholy, but positive life, the life of the great world—his great world—not the *grand monde* as there understood if he wasn't mistaken, which seemed squeezable into a couple of rooms of that inconvenient and ill-warmed house: all with nothing worse to brood about, when necessary, than the mystery perhaps of the happiness that would so queerly have come to her. To some perception of his view and his judgment, and of the patience with which he was prepared to insist on them, he fondly believed himself

to be day by day bringing her round. She mightn't, she couldn't yet, no doubt, wholly fall in with them, but she saw, he made out, that he had built a bridge which would bear the very greatest weight she should throw on it, and it was for him often, all charmingly, as if she were admiring from this side and that the bold span of arch and the high line of the parapet—as if indeed on occasion she stood straight there at the spring, just watching him at *his* extremity and with nothing, when the hour should strike, to prevent her crossing with a rush. (244-245)

These passages, which might be multiplied many times over,<sup>13</sup> show the extensive alterations that James made in the expository and narrative parts of *The American*. The revisions do not, however, change the character of Newman. At most they emphasize a motive or mood already present in the first version or supply the state of mind for the actions and speeches. And the crucial dramatic passages—e.g., Newman's pronouncement about a great marriage, his proposal, his interviews with the de Bellegardes—all these remain essentially unchanged. Here we find, I think, the key to James's theory of revision. He looked upon Newman as a conscientious biographer looks upon his subject: he had no right to change in 1907 what Newman said and did in 1877, but he could speculate about the states of mind back of those deeds and words. This is what James must have meant when, after freely acknowledging the weaknesses in *The American*, he concluded ". . . clinging to my hero as to a tall, protective, good-natured elder brother in a rough place, I leave the record to stand or fall by his more or less convincing image."<sup>14</sup>

The same thing is true of the other characters in the novel. Re-reading in 1907, James saw that the most serious defect in *The*

<sup>13</sup> See, for example, the interview between Newman and Mrs. Bread (1877, pp. 224-226; 1907, pp. 254-256) and the love scene (1877, p. 239; 1907, p. 272).

<sup>14</sup> *The Art of the Novel*, p. 39.

*American* was the conduct of the Marquise and her older son. He now felt that in actual life the "house of de Bellegarde . . . would . . . have comported itself in a manner as different as possible from the manner to which my narrative commits it."<sup>15</sup> Instead of holding aristocratically aloof from Newman, they would have squeezed him for every possible dollar. James also saw that the Marquise's murder of her husband was insufficiently accounted for. The whole conduct of the de Bellegardes, he admitted, was "much more showy . . . than sound."<sup>16</sup> Yet they remain the same in the 1907 version. If there is a shift, it is to make them even more heartless and corrupt. Thus in the original, when Newman first met the Marquise, he "walked up to the old lady by the fire and shook hands with her," but in the revision he "came sufficiently near to the old lady by the fire to take in that she would offer him no handshake."<sup>17</sup> In the revised scene in which the de Bellegardes break with Newman, the latter speaks and thinks of the mother in such terms as *hag*, *odious*, and *offensive*, stronger words than he used in 1877.<sup>18</sup>

The motive behind the de Bellegardes' rejection of Newman is the same in both versions—namely, they cannot reconcile themselves to "a commercial person." But the motivation of the murder is perhaps changed. The circumstances of the crime are as follows: the Marquis and his wife did not get on well, and he "admired pretty women." When the daughter, Claire, reached eighteen, the mother insisted upon her marrying de Cintr , an odious man of fifty-five. The father objected, violently quarreled with his wife, and took to bed, never to rise again. The mother's reasons for making the match were de Cintr 's willingness to take a small settlement and his high social position. But in the revised version James may have added another and a darker motive. I say *may* because I am uncertain as to the meaning of an inserted statement, which I italicize, in the paper which the old Marquis wrote on his deathbed:

My wife has tried to kill me and has done it; I'm horribly, helplessly dying. It's in order to marry my beloved daughter to M. de Cintr  *and then go on herself all the same*. With all my soul I protest—I forbid it. I'm not insane—ask the doctors, ask Mrs. B. It was alone with me here

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 35.

<sup>17</sup> 1877, p. 167; 1907, p. 181.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> 1877, pp. 323-327; 1907, pp. 372-376.

to-night; she attacked me and put me to death. It's murder if murder ever was. Ask the doctors, tell everyone, show everyone this.<sup>19</sup>

If *go on herself all the same* means that the Marquise was involved in an adulterous relation with de Cintr , then James has added a stronger motive for the murder. This interpretation finds some support in one other emendation which James made in Mrs. Bread's review of the murder:

1877

"My lady had long ago got over her jealousy, and she had taken to indifference."  
(392)

1907

"My lady had long ago got over 'minding'—minding, I mean, the worst; for she had had plenty of assistance for throwing things off."  
(447)

The phrase, *plenty of assistance*, may mean that the Marquise sought consolation in extramarital relations. But even if we accept this reading, it motivates only the murder; it does not affect the de Bellegardes' rejection of Newman. In short, James left the de Bellegardes just about as they were in 1877 even though he saw that their conduct was an "affront to verisimilitude." He might have changed them, but then, he explained, the situation and subject "wouldn't have been the theme of *The American* as the book stands, the theme to which I was from so early pledged."<sup>20</sup>

James did, however, slightly change the younger son, Valentin—to be more exact, he emphasized the warmth and intimacy of the attachment between Valentin and Newman. In the original version the two men immediately responded to each other, but James, by many small strokes, strengthened the relation to one of deep affection. Thus, Valentin addresses the American not "with almost impudent frankness" but with "confidence and candour."<sup>21</sup> Instead of merely liking something about the young Frenchman, Newman now suddenly yearns to know him. The heightened sympathy between the two men is also shown in the following passage, in which Valentin responds to Newman's statement that he never quarrels:

<sup>19</sup> 1877, p. 406; 1907, p. 464.

<sup>20</sup> *The Art of the Novel*, p. 36.

<sup>21</sup> 1877, p. 118; 1907, p. 128.

1877	1907
<p>"Never? Sometimes it's a duty— or at least it's a pleasure." (122)</p>	<p>"You mean you just shoot? Well, I notify you that <i>till</i> I'm shot, I shall have had a greater sense of safety with you than I have per- haps ever known in any relation of life." (133)</p>

In the scene in which Newman informs Valentin of his intention to court Claire de Cintré, James modifies the Frenchman's amusement by leaving out a half page, one of the longer deletions in the revision.<sup>22</sup> And one of Newman's speeches at Valentin's deathbed is changed so that it comes more from the heart.<sup>23</sup>

One important character remains to be considered—Mme de Cintré. She is untouched by the revision despite James's recognition in 1907 that she was too sketchily treated to win the belief of the reader, that in her case he had laid "too light a plank . . . over a 'dark' psychological abyss."<sup>24</sup> But to have thrown more light upon her would have blurred the focus on Newman; and this was a price that James did not wish to pay.

The changes which James made in *The American* square exactly with his general statements on the subject of revision. Looking back on his preparation of the New York edition, James said that before he began work he had mistakenly identified revision with rewriting, whereas in the actual event they had "almost nothing in common."<sup>25</sup> He soon distinguished between them, for to a correspondent who objected to his revising *Roderick Hudson* he replied: ". . . to attempt to retouch the *substance* of the thing would be as foolish as it would be (in a *done* and impenetrable structure) impracticable. What I have tried for is a mere revision of surface and expression. . . ."<sup>26</sup> Revision, then, might be ever so thorough, but it was fundamentally different from rewriting.

James did not clearly define the latter. Even in his last word on the subject he said: "What re-writing might be was to remain—it has remained for me to this hour—a mystery."<sup>27</sup> But one may suppose that it involved such things as these: compressing or extending the time covered in a novel; omitting, adding, or redis-

<sup>22</sup> 1877, p. 148; 1907, p. 162.

<sup>23</sup> 1877, pp. 343-344; 1907, p. 394.

<sup>24</sup> *The Art of the Novel*, p. 39.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 339.

<sup>26</sup> *The Letters of Henry James* (New York, 1920), II, 55.

<sup>27</sup> *The Art of the Novel*, p. 339.



posing episodes; altering the situation which sets the plot in motion; changing the forces which bring about the resolution; omitting or adding characters or changing their traits and motives. As we have seen, James did none of these in what he said was his most thorough revision, that of *The American*.

But this does not mean that James regarded revision as a superficial matter. On the contrary, he thought it required the fullest use of the imagination. In his first Preface he declared that to revise was "to live back into a forgotten state, into convictions . . . credulities . . . reasons of things . . . old motives."<sup>28</sup> And in his final Preface he repeatedly stressed "renewal of vision," retracing of footsteps, the "process of re-dreaming," and the thrill of discovering that "the 'old' matter is there, re-accepted, re-tasted, exquisitely re-assimilated and re-enjoyed, believed in, to be brief, with the same 'old' grateful faith. . . ."<sup>29</sup> When James was unable to rekindle the original, creative glow of a novel, he simply excluded it from the New York edition. Thus he said that he was unable "to read over *Washington Square*. . . . it must go."<sup>30</sup> He could not revise the book, and he did not believe in rewriting.

But if James could reread an early work, if the "germ" was still swollen with values, if the "predicament" raised moral problems and rendered human sensibilities, if the central character had an inner validity—then James could revise. In the Preface to *Roderick Hudson* he compared himself to a painter who places one of his old works on an easel. With a moist sponge he cleans up the picture. If the "canvas does obscurely flush," the painter at once uses his brush and varnish bottle. The sponge reveals the old subject matter only if the artist is able to "live back . . . the old relation," and the varnish brings out more clearly and makes more durable the original values. Revision was active, sympathetic re-reading in the light of a quarter-century of study of and practice in the art of fiction. During that time James had experienced the growth of an "immense array of terms, perceptive and expressive";<sup>31</sup> and as he reread in 1906-07, these terms "simply looked over the heads" of those he had set down on his page in 1877. Revision consisted of accepting those terms, of redirecting the original values in a "myriad more adequate channels." The alterations were

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>30</sup> Herrick, *op. cit.*, p. 736.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 339-340.

<sup>31</sup> *The Art of the Novel*, p. 339.

not determined by any set theory. James was unable to "forecast these chances and changes and proportions,"<sup>32</sup> nor was he, after the event, able to draw up a general rule. "The term that superlatively, that finally 'renders,' is a flower that blooms by a beautiful law of its own (the fiftieth part of a second often so sufficing it) . . . it is *there* already, at any moment, almost before one can either miss or suspect it."<sup>33</sup>

It is wrong, then, to assume that James the Reviser mercilessly manhandled the works of James the First. As a matter of fact, he regarded his novels as independent creations, as having an existence of their own. He respected them just as a scrupulous biographer or historian respects actual people and historical events. Newman did not come to James's mind as a list of analyzed, excogitated motives and qualities; he appeared spontaneously as a self-contained, independent person who had to be treated as a unity. He could not be revised by simply adding or subtracting a trait or reversing an action. To have made such changes would, in James's view, have been the equivalent of a biographer's staying the execution of Louis XVI or a historian's tampering with the Battle of Waterloo.

With respect to revision James took a position midway between that of, say Charles Reade and that of George Moore. Reade was indignant about *Blackwood's* editorial pressure on *The Woman Hater* when it appeared as a serial, but when he issued the novel in book form he used the serial text with only four inconsequential changes in phrasing. James would have called that irresponsible republication. Moore, on the other hand, completely rewrote *A Modern Lover*. James would have called that irresponsible re-writing.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 342.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*